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**Gerald O'Collins, *Revelation. Towards a Christian Interpretation of God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ*,
Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, 247 p.
ISBN 978-0-19-108700-3**

Słowa kluczowe: Gerald O'Collins; Boże Objawienie; samoobjawienie Boga.

Keywords: Gerald O'Collins; revelation; divine self-revelation.

The book under review is one of the latest monographs of the renowned scholar, a retired professor of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Gerald O'Collins. The book is his next work on the fundamental concepts of the Christian faith. There is no need to introduce the author. However, it is worth reminding that for years he has been engaged in the revision of the basic content of Catholic theology, such as Christology, salvation, redemption, God's revelation or biblical inspiration. He is also the author and editor of general studies devoted to fundamental theology, Catholicism and more profound understanding of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The reviewed book, consisting of twelve chapters, an epilogue and an appendix, is an attempt to define in a comprehensive manner the concept of divine revelation in Catholic theology, taking into consideration the conciliar documents, the most recent documents of the pontifical commissions, and the works of many other theologians. The main aim of the author is to describe the most important elements and characteristics of divine self-revelation,¹ which achieved its fullness in Jesus Christ. The individual chapters discuss the nature and functions of revelation (chapters 1-3), its sacramental character and mediators (chapters 4-5), its impact (chapters 6-7), historical division (chapter 8),

¹ The term "divine self-revelation" was coined and used by the author himself. See the discussed book p. 12.

its relation to Tradition (chapter 9), inspiration (chapter 10) and the formation of the canon and biblical truth (chapter 11). Finally, the question of the availability of revelation is discussed in chapter 12.

In the first place, a quite common trend in theology, according to which revelation is sometimes equated with biblical inspiration and limited to the truths about God transmitted to us comes under the author's criticism. However, it should be understood primarily as God's initiative to enable man to personally know the Creator. It is not so much about knowing the truths about God as about the Truth, namely God. It is about a personal encounter between God and man.² According to the author, this is the primary meaning of revelation as opposed to the (secondary) propositional sense,³ which is the transmission of information about God. Before the Second Vatican Council, the latter approach, however, came to the fore, which led to a significant reduction in theology. This first sense is most fully manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. It is in Him that it is possible to know God by accepting His presence in faith and experiencing it. Revelation must be experienced so that it can be accepted or rejected.

The aforementioned criticism of describing revelation, as a content about God, does not signify, however, that this secondary sense is incorrect. There is a logical order. The second approach originates naturally from the first one. First, we know God in His personality, then the content and truths associated with Him. Knowing God implies having knowledge about Him. Only in the propositional sense of revelation is it possible to speak about its content.

An important feature of divine self-revelation, which O'Collins emphasizes, is its complete gratuitousness and freedom. Although it results from God's love, it does not imply necessity. God could remain silent towards His creation. Moreover, revelation intensifies the mystery of God rather than eliminates it. Another important feature of revelation, observed by the author, is its effectiveness. The word of God is never without effect (cf. Is 55:10-11). Knowing God and accepting the truth about Him leads to salvation.

Subsequently, the sacramental character of revelation, its mediators and means of transmission are discussed. The author explains the similarity be-

² "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. ... By his Revelation, "the invisible God, (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17) from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company." DV 2.

³ In the English text "propositional" – see pp. 13–15. Translation based on F. G. Downing, *Objawienie*, in: *Słownik hermeneutyki biblijnej*, eds. R.J. Coggins, J.L. Houlden, trans. B. Widła, Warszawa 2005, pp. 629–632.

tween the signs and words which accompany the sacraments and make them effective and the mode of functioning of divine self-revelation. It is a statement of God consisting of both words and actions. Words can precede the actions, explaining God's will, as is the case with prophecy, but also follow the events as a divine interpretation, which is visible in the New Testament. As the means of transmission of revelation, the author mentions revelation through created reality, and then through the inner spiritual reality, accessible to every human being. Among the mediators of revelation, he distinguishes the institutionalized (e.g. kings, priests) and non-institutionalized ones (e.g. prophets). The author stresses that the number of mediators and modes of transmission is unlimited and God can use even unworthy tools.

In the next part, the author discusses the impact of revelation. He propounds a thesis that for revelation to exist, it is necessary to accept it in faith. Like love, it is reciprocal by nature. If there was no one to whom God would reveal Himself, revelation could not exist and as a concept would be contradictory in itself. At the same time, by getting to know God, man discovers himself in a new way. "Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself ..." ⁴ O'Collins indicates that the history of saints perfectly illustrates this fact. Man, getting to know God, gains a more profound knowledge of himself. ⁵ At this point, the postulate of the author appears to deepen the relationship between theology and spirituality, which has been fundamentally neglected. Revelation comes to man in different situations. Some experience the presence of Christ in a personal way, whereas others, through the testimony of other people, are invited to a relation with Him. Yet some get to know God through the revealed content. O'Collins believes that human sinfulness is the main obstacle in recognizing and accepting the revealing God.

In chapter 8, the author focuses on the historical definition of revelation and indicates the possibility of distinguishing its three stages: basic (either original or primary), dependent and final. The basic stage is all God's works and words which have reached their fullness and summit in Jesus Christ. This stage finished with the end of the Apostolic Age. Then the dependent stage began, which has taken place until the present day. At this stage, the Holy Spirit acts in the Church, constantly actualizing and enhancing what has already been

⁴ *Gaudium et spes* 22.

⁵ A similar thought is expressed by John Paul II in his homily for the inauguration of his pontificate. O'Collins, however, does not refer to the words of John Paul II. Cf. John Paul II, *The Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of his Pontificate*, 5.

revealed (see Jn 14:26). The final stage is to see God face to face in the life to come (see Rev 21:3).

After examining all the features of revelation, O'Collins discusses its relationship with Tradition, inspiration and biblical truth. The author strongly emphasizes that one should never identify revelation with Tradition, inspiration or the Holy Scriptures. If we were to create a diagram showing the proper sequence of the occurrence of individual phenomena, revelation would be placed first as preceding everything else. Then, it would be Tradition as a living transmission of the experience of the salvific presence of Christ, next, inspiration as an impulse stimulating chosen people to write down this experience and finally, the Holy Bible as a testimony of God's revelation. It should be remembered that revelation itself, as an event, cannot be included in other concepts, being a much broader idea.

The final chapter is devoted to the question of the divine revelation reaching the 'others'. It is obvious that it is available to believers who have known Christ. But what about those who did not have such a possibility? Here the author cites biblical testimonies and reminds us of the stories of Adam, Eve or Noah. All of them had access to God who had revealed Himself to them before the Abrahamic covenant. The Bible also demonstrates the possibility of knowing the Creator through the beauty of creation (see Rom 1:19-20). In addition, the author quotes the words of the Second Vatican Council about a "ray of Truth" present in every religion.⁶ These considerations lead him to the statement of the universality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and His Spirit.

The book ends with an epilogue summarizing briefly the purpose of the publication and highlighting the author's questions and doubts which he was unable to answer adequately. O'Collins is fully aware that there are many aspects which still require a deeper reflection. The appendix includes a detailed description of the influence of the biblical inspiration on readers of the Holy Scriptures, based on the examples of the lives of Anthony the Great, Augustine and Girolamo Savonarola. The content of the appendix does not add any new elements to the book, but it provides a more comprehensive illustration of the impact of revelation on human life. Thus, the author's decision to place this text outside the main body is fully justified.

The book of Gerald O'Collins quite exhaustively discusses the concept of God's revelation, offering a multidimensional approach. The most important theses which the author points out are: 1) the primacy of the approach to revelation as a personal self-revelation of God, before the propositional approach; 2) emphasis that revelation and Tradition, inspiration and the Holy Scriptures

⁶ *Nostra Aetate* 2.

are not the same; 3) marking the continuous actualization of God's self-revelation, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church; 4) the universalism of revelation, reaching every human being. One can, however, notice that something is missing in the book by O'Collins. Apart from several short passages, the author almost does not refer to the Book of Revelation, which, after all, begins with the words: "the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him ..." (Rev 1:1). Many texts from the book could be used to discuss the stage of the final revelation, which could considerably broaden the understanding of the presented description. It is, however, a single noticeable shortcoming. The book helps the readers to look more deeply and with a renewed freshness at God's revelation. One may risk saying that it should be a must-read for every theological adept. It is also worth mentioning here the latest book of the author on the biblical inspiration,⁷ which expands on some of the themes discussed in the book under review.

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⁷ G. O'Collins, *Inspiration. Towards a Christian Interpretation of Biblical Inspiration*, Oxford 2018.